

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA NIACT IMMEDIATE

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TAGS: EAID, SOPR, CG

SUBJECT: ZAIRE IN U.S. PRESS

FOLLOWING ARE THE MORE PERTINENT SECTIONS OF FEATURE, FRONT
PAGE ARTICLE BY DAVID B. OTTAWAY IN JUNE 6 EDITION OF
WASHINGTON POST:

...THE WESTERN POWERS HAVE FINALLY DECIDED TO TAKE THEIR
STAND AGAINST THE GROWING SOVIET AND CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN
AFRICA HERE IN ZAIRE. THEY ARE MEETING IN PARIS TO DISCUSS
WAYS OF DEFENDING PRESIDENT MOBUTU SESE SEKO'S 13-YEAR-OLD
GOVERNMENT AGAINST ANY FURTHER ATTEMPTS BY LEFTIST REBELS,
BACKING BY NEIGHBORING ANGOLA, WITH THE AID OF THE SOVIET
UNION AND CUBA, TO OVERTHROW HIM.

ALSO AT STAKE IN PARIS IS WHETHER THESE POWERS WILL
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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CURRENT CRISIS TO TAKE A COMMON STAND
TOWARD MOBUTU.

FOR ZAIRE, UNDER PRESIDENT MOBUTU, HAS BEEN SLOW TO MAKE
MEANINGFUL REFORMS.

DESPITE THE COUNTRY'S EVER-GROWING FINANCIAL, ECONOMIC AND

SECURITY CRISIS, NO WESTERN NATION HAS BEEN ABLE SO FAR TO

CURB THE WHIM AND WILL OF THE ZAIRIAN LEADER. THIS HAS BEEN LARGELY BECAUSE OF HIS SHREWD TACTIC OF PLAYING ONE WESTERN NATION OFF AGAINST ANOTHER, THREATENING A BREAK IN DIPLOMATIC TIES OR A SERIOUS CRISIS IN RELATIONS WHENEVER ONE OF THEM DARED PRESS HIM TOO HARD.

MEANWHILE, THE PRESENT U.S. AMBASSADOR, WALTER CUTLER, APPEARS WORRIED THAT MOBUTU MAY TURN AGAINST HIM JUST AS HE DID AGAINST HINTON. CUTLER HAS ORDERED HIS STAFF TO KEEP AS MUCH DISTANCE AS POSSIBLE FROM AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS, APPARENTLY OUT OF FEAR THAT THE ZAIRIAN LEADER MIGHT BLAME THE EMBASSY FOR ANY NEGATIVE REPORTING ON HIS LEADERSHIP.

THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED LAST YEAR DURING THE FIRST 80-DAY WAR IN ZAIRE'S SHABA PROVINCE WHEN THE U.S. EMBASSY MADE A MAJOR EFFORT TO HELP KEEP WESTERN REPORTERS ABREAST OF BREAKING NEWS AT THE DISTANT WAR FRONT.

THIS TIME, AMERICAN REPORTERS HAVE RECEIVED PRACTICALLY NO INFORMATION ABOUT THE WAR FROM THE EMBASSY, EVEN ABOUT EVENTS DIRECTLY AFFECTING U.S. INTERESTS SUCH AS THE EVACUATION OF AMERICANS FROM THE KOLWEZI AREA. INDEED, THEY WERE INITIALLY LED TO BELIEVE THAT NO SUCH THING WAS UNCLASSIFIED

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HAPPENING.

YET, THERE IS AN ALMOST UNIVERSAL CONVICTION AMONG THE WESTERN EMBASSIES HERE THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE A STAND, WHEN MOBUTU IS MORE DEPENDENT THAN EVER FOR HIS SURVIVAL ON THE largesse OF WESTERN NATIONS EVEN TO BRING A PAN-AFRICAN FORCE TO HIS RESCUE.

HE HAS, AFTER ALL, LOST THREE-QUARTERS OF HIS COPPER PRODUCTION, WORTH ABOUT \$300 MILLION IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE. THIS IS BETWEEN A THIRD AND QUARTER OF ZAIRE'S TOTAL FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS.

THERE IS ALSO A FEELING AMONG SOME WESTERN DIPLOMATS FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT PERHAPS ALL IS NOT HOPELESS. INDEED, THEY POINT CAUTIOUSLY TO SOME SIGNS OF REFORM IN THE MAKING.

IT IS TRUE, THEY READILY ACKNOWLEDGE, THAT THE ZAIRIAN ARMY DID NOT DISTINGUISH ITSELF IN THE DEFENSE OF KOLWEZI, THAT THE GENERAL IN COMMAND AND MANY OTHER OFFICERS FLED BEFORE THE REBEL ATTACK, AND THAT A GOOD PORTION OF THE

TROOPS RAN AWAY INTO THE BUSH.

BUT, THEY SAY, IT WAS ALSO TRUE THAT A FEW ZAIRIAN SOLDIERS HELD OUT BRAVELY IN TWO COMMAND POSTS AGAINST ENORMOUS ODDS AND THAT ONE POST WAS NEVER CAPTURED BY THE REBELS. FURTHERMORE, ZAIRIAN ARMY PARATROOPERS WHO WERE STILL UNDERGOING TRAINING MANAGED ON THEIR FIRST TEST IN BATTLE TO RETAKE THE KOLWEZI AIRPORT ON THEIR OWN -- TWO DAYS BEFORE FRENCH LEGIONAIRES DROPPED ON THE TOWN.

ONE PERSON SOMEWHAT AMAZED BUT EXTREMELY PLEASED BY THE PARATROOPERS' SHOWING WAS COL. YVES GRAS, WHO HEADS THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION HERE PROVIDING 40 ADVISERS TO THE ZAIRIAN ARMY. HIS THEORY IS THAT IF A SHOCK FORCE OF 3,000 UNCLASSIFIED

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RELATIVELY WELL-DISCIPLINED PARATROOPS COULD BE FORMED, THEN ZAIRE MIGHT HANDLE ANOTHER SHABA INVASION MOSTLY ON ITS OWN.

BUT THE PROBLEM OF ARMY DISCIPLINE REMAINS ENORMOUS, AS CLEARLY INDICATED BY THE WIDESPREAD LOOTING AND EXTORTION EVEN BY THE ELITE PARATROOPS IN KOLWEZI. FOR SOME REASON, THE MOBUTU GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PAY ITS SOLDIERS WITH ANY REGULARITY, ALTHOUGH IT DEPENDS ON THEM FOR ITS SURVIVAL.

THE BASIC QUESTION, HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO WESTERN ECONOMISTS, HAS ALWAYS BEEN LESS ONE OF GETTING PRESIDENT MOBUTU TO RECOGNIZE HIS PROBLEMS AND PROPOSE THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS THAN OF GETTING HIM TO CARRY THROUGH ON ANY RESCUE PROGRAM.

"THERE IS A TENDENCY HERE TO ACT AS IF THE PROBLEM IS OVER ONCE A SPEECH HAS BEEN MADE AND A DECISION ANNOUNCED," COMMENTED ONE ECONOMIST. VANCE

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